

## HIKE THROUGH HISTORY

### Harpers Ferry Middle School, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia



The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) Visitor Center in Harpers Ferry, WV, receives approximately 15,000 visitors per year, while less than one mile down the road Harpers Ferry National Historical Park receives an average of 300,000 visitors annually. In an effort to bridge this gap and promote the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) in both the park and town of Harpers Ferry, NPS staff met with the principal of Harpers Ferry Middle School to suggest a place-based service learning

opportunity that met several West Virginia Content Standards & Objectives for 6th grade students in Language Arts, Social Studies and Science.

National Park Service (NPS) and ATC staff hoped for 30-50 students engaged in the project. However, after a meeting with the 6th grade team, it was decided that all 165 6th grade students would be involved! A timeline was established over the course of the school year for lessons and events that would lead to the development of an Appalachian Trail brochure. The timeline included an introduction to the Appalachian Trail and the project for all students, staff and parents, a hike on the Appalachian Trail, a lesson in map and compass use and triangulation as an introduction to use of GPS units, a hike of the route to be highlighted in the brochure with GPS units, cameras, and notebooks, and a visit by a graphic designer to discuss good protocol for brochure design. Finally, teams of students drafted several versions of a brochure using field notes, photos and a map created from their GPS coordinates by NPS GIS staff. Students voted on the various elements of the brochures and combined them into two versions submitted to the NPS and ATC. Using elements from both versions, a final brochure was created and printed, funded through a grant received from Toyota.

After seeing how much fun the 6th graders were having on this project, the president of the student council visited the ATC visitor center and asked for a project of their own. The council adopted a trailhead kiosk and with the help of a graphic designer, made a fabulous directional poster highlighting features of the Appalachian Trail and sights within Harpers Ferry.